

Reflections from three Great Books students

Ava Randel (2017)

I can honestly say that I had no idea what to expect before our trip to L'Arche. I learned all I could from researching the website, but I felt I was still in the dark as to what daily life actually looked like. I loved their mission statements and all of their professed ideals, but I couldn't wrap my head around how they played out. I learned quickly that L'Arche is something that needs to be experienced from within in order to be fully understood. I was blown away by the simplicity and intention behind the lifestyle at L'Arche. The community in Seattle has 13 core members (the name for residents with developmental disabilities). The intent of L'Arche is, as they say, not to be a solution but a sign to the surrounding community and world. I think the core of what L'Arche is about can be a major lesson for everybody, and can be applied in all forms of human interaction. While I stayed there I felt welcomed simply because of my personhood. I felt like I was home. Many members of our team commented throughout the week on how nice it felt to live in a homelike environment after being at college for a semester and a half, especially in such a high-achieving school like Pepperdine, where the lines between home and school are blurred. I would go a step further and say that L'Arche stands out from our entire society in many ways. Worth is not assigned based on merit or achievements, and nobody feels the need to compete or hide or pretend. Everyone simply just is. L'Arche is a place of mutuality and trust, of grace and forgiveness, of love. These values sound cliché, but even after spending just one week in the community of L'Arche, I know that they understand what life and humanity are all about. "Many are the lofty and proud, but to the humble, the LORD reveals His secrets" (Sirach 3:19).

Lauren Lee (2017 & 2018)

There are a few lessons that I'd the privilege to learn and want to bring back to me in the everyday life of the business of school: 1) Each of the assistants and core members were encouraged to take 3 hrs per day of personal time, where they could do whatever they wished to do, or nothing at all. It ranged from going on walks, sitting in any of the numerous coffee shops just blocks in any direction from any of the 3 houses, playing the piano in the living room, reading, painting, or just spending time in one's room. This form of self-care was extremely eye-opening to me, as so often I just pack my days top to bottom, without allowing any space for me to sit in the day, appreciate what I've done, and relax, not just physically, but also mentally. Many times I get guilty when taking personal time because I could be doing something else, but having the time and the space to allow myself not to think about what I did, what I could be doing, or what I have to do next has done wonders in recentering myself. 2) In the L'Arche community, the core members are the adults with disabilities and the live-in caregivers are called assistants. While one could definitely hold conversations with any of the 3 core members, what impressed me the most was the way that the assistants gave a core member their full, unbroken attention and patience in allowing a core member to process, which sometimes was a bit slower than I was used too. Without interrupting, an assistant would just give the core member the space and the eye contact, which encouraged the core member to process at his or her own pace. This is a very applicable lesson that I've been practicing in having conversations with people just allowing them their time to fully communicate what they want to express.

Sophia Cheong (2018)

Coming to L'arche, I had a few goals set in mind that I wanted to fulfill by the end of this week: I wanted to realize more of who I am or who I wanted to be, really grow more as a person, and of course, do everything I've ever wanted to do in Seattle: hit up the coffee

shops, go to Molly Moons, and freeze in non-Californian weather, and I'm not kidding, because I love freezing in the cold. These may seem like they have nothing to do with L'arche itself, but actually they do, except for my third point, I guess. Through this L'arche community, everyone made me realize things I never thought about or understood before. And through the L'arche community, I was able to get out of my comfort zone, including praying out loud in front of others for the first time. I won't exaggerate and say that I'm totally and completely a new person than I was just a week ago, because as much as I want to think otherwise, one week can't change you all that much. But one week comprised of new interactions with several, different people and facing several challenges and hardships makes you reflect and think a lot. I'm so glad I was always able to take in something new each day. The first day at L'arche made me realize that it's ok to not talk to the core members sometimes. Just because you're with them, doesn't mean you have to make a conversation flow the entire time. Initially, I tried hard to continuously make initiatives to begin a conversation with them, thinking that it'd be weird to be silent in their presence. But I need to take a step back and realize that it's ok to be silent. On Sunday, I was introduced to a new, not-so-new term I never contemplated about, the word being "human." We are all human. Me, you, the core members....we're unique in our own ways, but in the end, we're all the same. But what does it mean to be human? This is a question I've contemplated every day of this week. Is one "qualified" as a human being if a snapchat filter recognizes one's face? Then what about if someone has a disorder like neurofibromatosis, for instance, that causes their faces to be completely distorted? Does it mean they are any less human than we are? Or maybe being human means to live in the image of God. Or does being human mean having 46 chromosomes? Or does being human, as Socrates and Aristotle, some of the best philosophers known to man, have said mean

having the ability to rationalize and understand rationalism? In the end though, this question falls into the realm of obscure, abstract ideas that can't be answered. As a matter of fact, I think it's harder to understand the term "human" through a religious, philosophical, or scientific perspective, even though I am fascinated about these 3 topics. I think the idea of human can best be understood through a rudimentary perspective.

Perhaps 4 being human is one who has feelings: crying when you're sad, smiling when you're happy. Having stress breakouts. Having split ends. Wearing worn out jeans or stained t-shirts. Scraping your knees when you fall. Having bloody noses. Dry hands. And most importantly, having the freedom to be who you want to be and how you want to be perceived as an individual, without caring what others think about you. And this is something I admire in the core members. Their ability to live, even if they might look different on the outside. I admire them for being so wonderfully beautiful on the inside as well, even more than many others in this world. On Monday I noticed how the core members pray about very specific things: like being thankful for the potatoes on their plate or for buying fruit candy at the store. It was a constant reminder that every little thing matters and it so significant to them, and I strongly believe that these kinds of prayers hold so much more value than praying for that car you want, or that A you want in your class, or that guy you want to date. I don't want to make this essay as long as a Great Books paper, so I won't go on to the other days of the week. I think what I, and many of us, can learn from this week is that as long as we're all living our best lives, whatever that may be, that's all that really matters. And that was truly visible to me in the core members. They make the best of their life, and I think that's something I realized that I need to be doing. I really liked what Gerry said about glasses. You can see the world so clearly with glasses on. But what happens when you take them off? Everything's so blurry. I liked how he said it

causes us to think introspectively when we take off our glasses, since we can't really see the world in front of us. That's something I need to do. I've spent too much trying to understand the outside world that I haven't thought a lot about myself and who I am. So thank you to the core members who made me realize so much about what I should be doing in life. It was nice just doing simple every day activities like watching t.v. shows, going bowling, planting flowers, going grocery shopping, and playing card games. It was a constant reminder that the core members are not much different from us.

We learned a lot from you and I hope us being here was nice for you too and that you had as much as fun as we did. I'm very lucky and thankful to have been able to experience a loving and caring L'arche community. But I also wanna give a shout out to my Project serve group, who made our group feel like a family. I enjoyed having a two and a half hour conversation at a coffee shop with Lauren, trying to beat Shu in bowling, running for 20 minutes to get Molly Moon's at 10:30 at night with Arina, running at Volunteer Park at 7 am in the freezing cold morning and almost dying with Daniel, bothering Paul about his life in the car, and playing card games and constantly enjoying Fay's humor these past couple days. I also absolutely loved how we used our group chat to send pictures of what we were doing at certain points of the day. Not to be competitive or anything, but I set the record with 60 pictures, Daniel sent 38, Lauren sent 32, Shu sent 21, Jonathan sent 7, Fay sent 4, Arina sent 3, and last but not least, Paul sent a total of 0. Good job Paul. Just like how the core members are thankful for the little things, I realized how much I enjoyed the little, specific moments with Jonathan, Lauren, Shu, Arina, Daniel, Paul, and Fay. I enjoyed getting to being able to meet and live with Elizabeth, Erin, and Carolyn this past week. I enjoyed 5 getting to meet and know all the assistants and admiring all the assistants' continuous enthusiastic personality and ability to make the core members smile

a lot. Every memory, whether that be something super simple, made a difference in me this week. So maybe one week can't completely change a person. After all, I still love tea. I still love science. I still like kale. I still like to read newspapers over online news articles. I still love to dance and listen to music. I still like fashion. I still love having deep conversations with people. I still love viewing the city lights from afar. I still love smelling the fresh, morning crisp air. I still like writing in my reflection journal. I'm still spontaneous, yet organized, and a bubbly human being. But this week sure renewed me. It made me more appreciative of little things. I've been pretty good with spreading positivity but I need to work on accepting more positivity and cutting out the negative things in my life. I'm so happy that L'arche was one of the very positive things I can accept into my life. I'm still going to do what I've been doing before L'arche: working out weekly, studying a lot. I'm still going to be as confident, optimistic, and strong-willed as possible. But I'm ok with not being perfectly perfect. I'm ok with not having a six pack, or having a 4.0 GPA, or being confident, optimistic, and strong-willed 24/7. I'm ok with making mistakes and I like myself just the way I am and I think that's what makes me human. Thank you L'arche for helping me realize this. Overall, it was a great, positive experience and I learned a little bit about each and everyone of you, and I hope this helped you get to know a little bit more about me too.